

23
David's LOYALTY to King Saul.

15264 A 33
S E R M O N

Preached at

Westminster-Abby,

O N

Monday, JANUARY 31. 1714.

Being the Anniversary of the

MARTYRDOM

O F

King CHARLES I. of ever
Blessed Memory.

By WILLIAM READING, M. A.
*Keeper of the London Clergy's Library in Sion
College.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for HENRY CLEMENTS, at the
Half-Moon in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1715.



28

W H E N this Sermon was lately preached at *Westminster-Abby*, a Person of no mean Figure and Character there, very heartily desired me to give it him in Print. I had no inclination of my self to Publish it, but being invited to it by so Learned an Auditor, I thought I should not shew good manners, nor a due sense of the great Honour he did me, if I did not readily comply. This is the true Reason why it now comes abroad; for which I hope, those who cannot so well esteem it, will however excuse the Publication of it.

W. R.

I S A M. xxiv. ver. 5, 6.

And it came to pass afterward, that David's Heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

And he said unto his Men, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my Master the Lord's Anointed, to stretch forth my Hand against him, seeing he is the Anointed of the Lord.



Have no Design by my choice of these Words, to put King *Saul* in the Ballance with the Royal Martyr of this Day, any more than the Church had, in appointing the Lamentation for the Death of the said King, to be the First Lesson for this Occasion. It is very certain that *Saul* disobey'd the Commands of God so presumptuously, that God rejected him in a very solemn and expresse manner. He transgressed the Laws of Religion with great contempt, slew the Priests in a barbarous manner, was remarkably cruel to his own Son, and his best Servant. But he whom God had anointed

ed over us, was truly zealous for the Reform'd Religion, and Ecclesiastical Establishment, constant and regular in the exercise of his Devotions, very solicitous to preserve a good Conscience in all the difficult Cases and Perplexities wherein he was involv'd ; and so far from Cruelty, that he spared those who had notoriously forfeited their Lives to him, when it was in his power to have cut them off, and so have secured himself from their further Attempts.

There was then a vast difference between them as to the Quality of their Actions, and the discharge of their great Trust in that high Station of Government wherein God had placed them. But in as much as they were Both the Lord's Anointed, Supream under God, and his immediate Vicegerents, so far they had an equal claim and title to the Privilege of being Sacred and Inviolable ; and no Pretence whatever could justify any Man in offering Violence to their Persons ; but every Man of Conscience and Honour, however provoked to it, or however tempted with opportunities of taking Revenge in the most easy and secure way, yet would shrink at the very Thought or Proposal of this sort of Violence, as a most grievous Sin against God. The truth of this Assertion is fully confirm'd to us by the Behaviour and Declaration of *David*, when Time and Place, and his own Counsellors, and the sense of his past Sufferings, and future Dangers from King *Saul*, did all concur to tempt him, not to do this Violence himself, but only

to permit it to be done by others on his account. *And it came to pass afterward, that David's Heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his Men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my Master the Lord's Anointed, to stretch forth my Hand against him, seeing he is the Anointed of the Lord.*

In discoursing upon these words, I shall consider these Four Things.

I. The Person and Circumstances of *David* at this time.

II. The Action here related, and the Reason of it. *He cut off the skirt of Saul's Robe.*

III. The Reflection which he made on what he had done. *His Heart smote him for this Action.*

IV. The solemn Declaration which he made on this occasion. *The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord's Anointed.*

I. Let us consider the Person and Circumstances of *David*. His Personal Endowments and Accomplishments are very highly extoll'd in Holy Scripture. God by a special Designation had chose him while very young, to be the next King of *Israel*, and had sent *Samuel* to anoint him privately in order to the same.
And

And from that time he was very dear to God, who inspir'd him with wonderful Gifts and Graces, and prosper'd him in all his Undertakings. When the Spirit of the Lord was departed from *Saul*, and an Evil Spirit came upon him; this was the Man who was found to be the fittest Person in all *Israel*, to divert and recover him with his Divine Musick. And as he underwent many hazards of his life in performing this piece of Service to his distracted Master, so, the Divine Goodness protecting and assisting him, he wrought a most memorable Deliverance for *Israel*, by overcoming the Giant of *Gath*, the bold Champion of the *Philistines*; besides many other Atchievements in War, to the Glory of God, and the Safety, Honour, and Welfare of his King and Country. But there were two Things which got him the mortal Hatred of *Saul*, and forced him to fly for his Life. One was, his great Merits and Services, which gain'd him the universal Love and Applause of the People; whereupon *Saul* conceiv'd an incurable Envy against him, and could not without the greatest Indignation hear honourable mention made of him; as it appear'd when in the Victory-Songs he observ'd it to be said, *Saul hath slain his Thousands, and David his ten Thousands*. The other Cause of *Saul's* Hatred was, that both he and all the People knew for certain, that *David* was to succeed him in the Kingdom. For these Reasons *Saul* left nothing unattempted, as well by secret Plots and Contrivances, and pretences of Friend-

Friendship and Honour, as by open force of Arms to procure his Servant's utter destruction. Of this cruel treatment *David* often complains in the book of *Psalms*, particularly *Pf. 57. v. 6. They have prepared a net for my steps; they have digged a pit before me.* Which passage hath a direct reference to the circumstances *David* was now in. *Saul*, who had his Spies abroad in every corner, had intelligence brought him that *David* (whom he had already hunted and pursued from place to place) was now in the Wilderness of *En-gedi*. Whereupon, according to his restless temper, he sets forward immediately with 3000 chosen men to surprize him; and came so near him, that he enter'd into the very same Cave, in whose sides *David* and his Company had taken up their Quarters. And thus much concerning the Person of *David*, and the Circumstances he was in at that time when he did and said what is related in the words of my Text.

I proceed in the

II^d Place, to consider that Action of his in cutting off the skirt of *Saul's* Robe, and his Reason for so doing.

Saul being come into the cave of *En-gedi*, and so fallen into the midst of that Pit, wherein he thought to have taken *David*, the latter had now such an advantage of the former, that he might deal with him as he should see fit. In such a juncture it was obvious enough for *David's* Company, who had been often

persecuted and pursued and brought into danger of their lives, to think of making all sure for the time to come, by using their present advantage to the destruction of their Enemies, and placing their Master on the Throne destin'd for him. This in all probability might be urged by some with many plausible and commonly allow'd Arguments: as, that such proceedings were very justifiable by the law of Arms, that the injurious Aggressor being thus in their power, should suffer the same mischief which they must have expected, had they fallen into his hands; that according to the present state of their Affairs, such a Retaliation was not only lawful, but absolutely necessary for their future Peace and Preservation, which they could never be secure of, while these their implacable Enemies were in being, and had power to molest them. But however they might be furnished with such common Arguments, yet it seems they had one much more extraordinary, which they chose to insist on; and that was a Divine Promise which they affirm'd had been made concerning this very Advantage now given them.

1 Sam. 24. 4. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day, of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold I will deliver thine Enemy into thine hand, that thou mayst do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's Robe privily. We can hardly conceive how an Action of this nature could be perform'd undiscover'd, without supposing a deep sleep to have fallen upon Saul and his Guards,

Guards, as we find Chap. 26. when they were again surprized by *David* and his men. Such a sleep hath happen'd to whole Armies at once, even centinels and all, through natural causes, viz. intemperance, great fatigue, or too much confidence of their safety; how much more by the special Will of God? But however, *David* had an opportunity both times to approach so very near the King's Person, as to carry away something that belonged to him; for no other end but to convince him, that there was no truth in that wicked Slander which had been reported of him, that he had a design to kill the King; forasmuch as it appeared by the Tokens which he produced, that the Kings life was entirely in his power, and he did him no manner of hurt. This *David* himself declares to be the cause why he cut off the skirt of the Royal Robe, N. 11. Moreover, my Father, see, you see the skirt of thy Robe in my hand: For in that I cut off the skirt of thy Robe, and killed thee not; know thou and see, that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my Soul to take it.

Thus you have seen what an implacable, restless, and causeless enemy *Saul* was to *David*; how he happen'd to fall into such a place where *David* might have taken his Life with all imaginable ease and security; how his Friends and Counsellors prompted him to lay hold of this opportunity, which they told him was a manifest completion of a Di-

vine Promise formerly made to him concerning this very Advantage. All which Considerations and Motives had no other influence upon him, than only to make him take hold of *Saul's* Robe, and cut off the skirt of it, in testimony of his firm Loyalty to him, and that when he had power over him, nothing could persuade him to make an ill use of it.

We come now in the

III^d Place to take notice of that severe Reflection which he made immediately upon what he had done. *His heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt.*

In another place it is said, that *David's* heart smote him because he had Number'd the People: So that this Smiting of the heart is a phrase in Holy Writ expressing a more than ordinary concern and anxiety of mind for the thing which he had done. Now this trouble of mind did not arise from his approaching so near the King's Person in a time of so much animosity and hazard; neither was he offended at himself for having carried off something from about him, to make it appear what an opportunity he had, and how far he was from any disloyal thought and intention; for these things were done by him again, *Chap. 26.* when he had the very same advantage offer'd him a second time, and took away the Spear and the Cruse of water which were at *Saul's* bolster; which surely he would never have done again, if he had condemn'd himself the first

first time for doing so much; whereas he makes no such penitent Reflection on this second Action.

The words of my Text do expressly assign the Reason why he was dissatisfied with his first Adventure. His heart smote him, *because he had cut off Saul's skirt*. Had he taken away any other Token from about him, we had heard of no concern expressed for it: But the cutting off the skirt of his Robe, though done with a most innocent and pious design, yet had an appearance of evil in it. And the goodness of his Intention could not satisfy *David* for the irregularity and insolence of the Action. The skirt could not be well taken off without cutting: And to do this, 'tis very likely a Sword or a Dagger was drawn. If this had been discover'd by any of the King's Guard, it must have laid *David* under a grievous imputation of some treacherous design, in coming about the King's Person in that clandestine manner with his naked Sword. Now *David* was a man of a great and generous as well as religious Heart, and therefore very tender both of his Innocence and Honour, and solicitous to avoid all suspicion or appearance of ill design against his Prince. He ventur'd very hard in these approaches, to put a stop to those malicious Reports which had represented him as a Traytor, and to extort a confession from his most inveterate Adversaries, that he had proved himself a very innocent and loyal man. But if such Adventures had been so ill managed,

managed, as to carry a foul appearance, and be turn'd to his condemnation, this would have been an unspeakable affliction to so brave and honest a Mind. This is natural enough for us to guess at, as one Reason why *David's* heart smote him on this occasion.

And yet we find by the Words, that this pang of remorse came upon him, not while the thing was doing, but after it was done, and he was come off safe and undiscover'd. *And it came to pass* afterward, *that David's heart smote him*: And the following Declaration which he makes hereupon, shews, that the tender regard which he had for the Sacred Person of the King, admonish'd him that he had gone too far in cutting his Robe, and that he had better have contented himself with some other Token. It is very probable that in his Eye, who had a most profound veneration for the Royal Dignity, the cutting the Robe, or defacing any Ornament belonging to it, look'd like stretching out his hand against the Lord's Anointed, and was some degree and resemblance of that enormous Sin, the very thought of which fill'd him with Confusion and Horror. *David* was endued with a great share of spiritual as well as natural Fortitude; he had sustain'd the shock of various Temptations, and got the victory over them: But yet well knowing the deceitfulness of Sin, how easily it insinuates itself into an unguarded heart, and to what a monstrous bulk it often arrives from very small beginnings, he therefore ex-
ercises

ercises a pious Jealousie over his thoughts, is forward to suspect his heart in time, and starts at the least whisper of a wicked Imagination, and the way that hath any tendency towards the compassing of it. And his Prayers were suitable to this good disposition and strict watch over himself, as we learn from the conclusion of *Psal. 19.* where having pray'd, *Keep thy Servant from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me: So shall I be undefiled and innocent from the great Offence;* he immediately adds, *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight;* intimating by his method of Prayer, that the spring and fountain of all wickedness is in the Heart; if we can but order our inward affections right, our outward actions will never be amiss.

Thus careful was this holy and gallant Man to keep his Conscience void of offence towards God and the World; and so far was he from being partial to himself, and favourable to his own Actions, that he is the first who spies a blemish in them, and presently gives them a severe check and correction.

Let us now consider in the

IVth Place, what a solemn profession he makes of his Duty to his Sovereign, and the indispensable Obligation which he owns he lies under, to keep strictly to the same. *And he said unto his Men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my Master the Lord's Anointed,*

Anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Anointed of the Lord.

And here we may observe how far *David* was from admitting those plausible Reasons and Pretences which were urged by his Counsellors to reconcile him to the commission of this Violence. They represented to him how great an Enemy was now in his hands; and they did not forget to put him in mind of a Divine Promise formerly made to him, That there should come a day when his Enemy should be so much in his power, that he might do to him what should seem good in his own eyes. 'Tis very likely such a Promise had been made to *David*; but in what latitude, whether with respect to the person of King *Saul*, or his Posterity, or *David's* Enemies in general, is not material for us to know, since the Scripture says no more of it. God who hath often been pleased to try his servants, hath also given them grace so to acquit themselves under such tryals, that they might be glorious Examples for our imitation. Without such notable incidents and occurrences, the Histories of their lives had not been of that use to us as now they are. It may suffice in the present enquiry to take notice, how *David* opposes the Importunity of his Friends. He knew by too sensible demonstrations, that *Saul*, who now lay at his mercy, was his most powerfull and dangerous Enemy: But he considers him not now as in a state of hostility, subject to the law of Arms; but as his dread Sovereign, invested with Di-
vine

vine authority, against whom he might not unsheath his sword on any account whatever. And therefore he rejects the instigations of his men with the utmost abhorrence: God forbid that I should do this thing to my Master, seeing he is the Lord's Anointed. No doubt but some of his Company advised him, since he abhorred the doing it with his own hand, to depute one of them to be his Executioner, or at least to go aside, and not hinder them: And by this means he might have a Salvo for his own Conscience and Reputation, and lay all the blame upon some rude and forward Soldier. But *David* was too good a man to connive at so impious a fact, or be any way accessory, directly or indirectly, to the commission of it. But as he declared himself against it, so he carefully restrain'd his Servants, and suffer'd them not to rise against *Saul*, as the Scripture expressly takes notice. And this manifests the integrity of his heart, and sincerity of his Grief for *Saul*, when afterwards he was slain by the *Philistines*. When he that brought him the News of his death, brought him also the Crown and Bracelet, as hoping to be well rewarded for his pains; yet when he own'd that he had put an end to the King's life, though he did it at *Saul's* own request, and at a time when he was in such anguish by reason of his wounds, that he could not live; notwithstanding this fair report of matters, *David* could not suffer him to breath one moment longer. *How*, says he, *wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's Anointed?* And he caused

C

him

him to be executed upon the place where he stood, pronouncing this Sentence on him ; *Thy blood be upon thy head ; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's Anointed.* This perhaps would have been thought but a Politick regard and concern, had it appear'd only at this time, and never before : But you may observe from the account I have given you, that this was no more than what was agreeable to *David's* constant perswasion and carriage during the life of *Saul*.

And so I have done with the Four Particulars rising directly from the words of my Text, and consider'd, 1. The Person and Circumstances of *David*, so far as they relate to the matter in hand. 2. That Action of his, in cutting off *Saul's* skirt, and his reason for so doing. 3. The sorrowfull Reflection which he immediately made on what he had done : His heart smote him for it. 4. The solemn profession which he makes of Loyalty to his Sovereign, and his indispensable obligation to adhere strictly to the same. *The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my Master the Lord's Anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Anointed of the Lord.*

The Conclusion from all this is so natural and clear, that we may trust any (a) one who will be determin'd by sacred Scripture, to make it. For you see both the discourse and practice

(a) Grotius in locum. *Regum Persona omnibus Sancta esse debet : Deus enim eorum iudex.*

of Holy *David* have fully resolved us in this Point, That it is a most detestable and damnable Sin, to stretch forth our hand in any case, against our Sovereign the Lord's Anointed.

And if we will acknowledge the truth of this Conclusion to concern us (as we needs must, and cannot avoid the force of it, because it is the Doctrine of the Evangelists and Apostles, as well as the Prophets) then we cannot without extreme sorrow and confusion of Face, remember the mournfull Tragedy of this Day.

That which hath been declared most impious and unlawfull to be done to a wicked King, was actually done among us, to a most Religious and Excellent Prince, with the highest aggravations of ignominy and reproach.

If *David's* heart smote him for cutting off the skirt of *Saul's* Robe, what harden'd wretches must those be, what Hellish fury must possess them, who without remorse embro'd their hands in the Blood of their Anointed Sovereign?

Herein they were so far from imitating Loyal *David* (who was a Type of Christ, and therefore ought to be of special Authority with Christians in his godly Example and virtuous Conversation) so far, I say, were they from regarding his sound judgment in this case, that they did more than could have enter'd into the hearts of his evil Counsellors.

They advised the death of one who would accept of no atonement for the life of their Master: But these compassed the death of him who was most ready to forgive, and heartily labour'd for Peace.

They perverted one Text of Scripture to justify their Counsel; but these did violence to the whole Book of God, that they might justify the violence done to his Anointed.

It is impossible for us to find any Instance, in the Histories of all Nations of the Earth, to match with the dismal Work of this Day.

And as the work itself was dismal, so the consequences of it have proved very direful : The Wrath of God hath long burn'd against our Land for being defiled with this Blood.

I doubt not but there are among us (even in this Age of Scoffers) many worthy Christians, who endeavour to stop the further execution of this Wrath, by a serious Humiliation for the crying Sin of this Day.

And next to a deep Humiliation and penitential sorrow for this Sin, we should study to amend whatever is amiss among us; especially such things as this Good King observed to be amiss, and was desirous to rectify in his own Reign; and recommended (when he was not suffer'd to do them himself) to the care of Posterity in some of his dying Words.

And 1. we ought to make Conscience of (a) Decency and Order in the worship of God. The neglect and contempt of this, was the Sin of the People in those times; a Sin that did

(a) His Majesty's Speech upon the Scaffold. *You must give God his due, by regulating rightly his Church, &c.*

easily beset them by the cunning craftiness of such as lay in wait to deceive them. And this Deceit soon appear'd, and their Sin was turned into their Punishment. The contempt of Decency and Order run down all Ecclesiastical Discipline; and this being down, laid open the Church for all pretended Prophets and Teachers to enter in, and abuse People with strange unheard of Doctrines, which had no foundation in Scripture, and were generally clear contradictions to it. This was giving the People a Stone instead of Bread, and instead of a Fish, a Scorpion.

2. We must live in dutiful subjection to our (a) Sovereign, the Lord's Anointed, whom he hath set over us. How sadly this Duty hath been transgressed among us, is notorious to all the World, and this Day is a standing monument of just shame and reproach to us for this Sin. A wilful and presumptuous Sin in all Orders of Men; being so clearly condemn'd in Scripture, that where it is read in a known Tongue, the meanest of the People cannot be ignorant of it. Indeed if Holy Scripture had said nothing of it, even Reason would teach us, that we cannot enjoy Life nor Liberty, nor call any thing our own, unless we study to preserve the Power which is appointed for a terror to evil-doers, and for the defence and safeguard of them that do well.

(a) 1b. *For the King, the Laws of the Land will clearly instruct you. Because it concerns my own particular, I only give you a touch of it.*

3. We

3. We must every one resolve to (a) mind our proper Callings and Business in peace and quietness. If we rightly consider it, we shall find Ambition and Discontent to have given the first fire to all Seditions and Rebellions, both among Angels and Men. Heaven could not make some Angels happy, because they saw themselves in an inferior Rank. The Blessings of Paradise could not satisfy the Heart of Man, while he lay under one single restraint. For these Reasons the Scripture hath said so many severe things against Pride and Discontent, because they were the First Sins in Heaven and Earth, and are evermore the occasions of infinite disorders both in Church and State.

To conclude therefore: Since we have grievously smarted under the deplorable effects of Rebellion, and have seen from what unruly Lusts and Passions it springs, let us with Loyal *David*, curb these Passions, and restrain these wicked Counsellors. Let us govern ourselves by the Rule of God's Word, according to the true purport and meaning of it, which is very plain and intelligible, not as it is wrested by the perverse disputings and distinctions of Faith-

(a) Ib. *The People's Liberty and Freedom consists in having of Government — not a share in the Government, that is nothing pertaining to them: A Subject and a Sovereign are two different things.*

less Men. Let us make it the measure of our Piety towards God, our Subjection to our Sovereign, whom he hath anointed to reign over us, and our Love towards all Men; that so God may be graciously reconciled to us, that he may delight to dwell among us, and grant us the Blessings of Unity, Peace, and Concord, not for our deserts, but for the merits of his only Son, our Blessed Lord; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory World without end.
Amen.

F I N I S.

BOOKS Printed for, and Sold by HENRY
CLEMENTS, at the Half-Moon in St.
Paul's Church-yard.

THE Royal Martyr. A Sermon Preach'd before their
Excellencies the Lords Justices of *Ireland*, in Christ-
Church, *Dublin*, On the xxxth of JANUARY, 1713.
By John Echlin, A. M. Publish'd by their Excellencies
Command. Price Four-pence.

The great Sin, and Certain Punishment, of Traiterous
Thoughts, and Rebellious Practices. Set forth in a Sermon
preach'd at the Cathedral Church in *Hereford*, on the 30th
of January, 1713. being the Anniversary-Fast for the Mar-
tyrdom of King Charles I. By Thomas Husbands, A. M. one
of the Vicars of the College of *Hereford*; and Vicar of Canon-
Pion.

The Royal Pattern. Or, a Sermon upon the Death of her
Late most Excellent Majesty Queen Anne; preach'd at the
Parish Church of *Finchley*, in the County of *Middlesex*, upon
unday August the 18th. 1714. and in the Parish-Church of
St. Mary Aldermanbury. By Nat. Marshall, L.L.B. Rector
of *Finchley*, and Lecturer of St. Mary Aldermanbury.

Just Published.

A Review of the *Lutheran* Principles: Shewing how they
differ from the Church of *England*, and that Baron *Puffen-
dorf's* Essay for uniting of Protestants, was not design'd to
procure an Union between the *Lutherans* and the Church of
England, as is insinuated in the Title of the late Edition of
that Book. In a Letter to a Friend. The second Edition. To
which is added a Postscript, containing some Transient Re-
marks on a late Virulent Pamphlet, Entituled, Two Letters
to the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount *Townshend*, &c.
By Tho. Brett, Rector of *Betteshanger* in *Kent*.

Of Drinking in remembrance of the Dead. Being the sub-
stance of a Discourse delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese
of *Cork*, on the Fourth of November, 1713.

Religion the distinguishing Character of Humane Nature:
And the Wisdom of acknowledging Divine Revelation. De-
liver'd in two Sermons preach'd in the Cathedral Church of
Winchester, at the Assizes, March the 4th, and July the 18th,
1714. By William Lowth, B. D. Prebendary of that Church.

